

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT

MALCOLM H. MERRILL, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, State Department of Public Health

EVIDENCE IS CONFLICTING as to the impact of Asian influenza on California this season. Considerable indication of the presence of the infection in many parts of the state has been forthcoming in the Viral and Rickettsial Disease Laboratory, but little information on community-wide outbreaks has been available.

School absenteeism remained essentially normal through the winter months but has not decreased as it usually does at this time of year. Industrial absenteeism has climbed moderately in some areas. Deaths from pneumonia and influenza have been elevated sharply in two of the last three report weeks. The evaluation of this information is complicated by the widespread presence of other epidemic diseases and the unseasonable weather in many parts of the state.

Laboratory-confirmed outbreaks have been described previously in two institutions, Stockton State Hospital and Yountville Veterans' Home. In addition, at the Preston School of Industry in Ione a respiratory epidemic caused illness in about one-fourth of the inmates. Laboratory studies are in progress.

The Merced County Health Department reported an increase in the number of patients admitted to the county hospital with pneumonia, but confirmation of the disease as influenza has not been obtained. It is known that primary atypical (Eaton agent) pneumonia and other respiratory diseases have been occurring throughout the Central Valley.

The strain of Asian virus causing this season's epidemic apparently differs to some degree from that of the original 1957 pandemic. Some authorities have stressed the importance of this antigenic variation, but at the Influenza Center for the Americas only minor variations have been noted. Likewise, claims of relative ineffectiveness of the polyvalent vaccine used this season have been made, but studies done under more carefully controlled conditions at the U.S. Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta have demonstrated "quite adequate protection."

The nationwide toll taken by this epidemic has been considerable; 3,478 excess pneumonia and influenza deaths have been reported since the first of

the year, as have 17,004 excess deaths from all causes. Several studies have shown an unexpectedly low attack rate among teenagers in affected areas.

The annual mussel quarantine went into effect May 1 along the entire California coast, including San Francisco Bay and all other bays, inlets and harbors. During the period of quarantine, May 1-October 31, mussels may concentrate a toxic material that is highly poisonous to man.

The quarantine prohibits the taking, sale or offering for sale of mussels, except for use as fish bait.

An adolescent unit to provide medical care for outpatients from 12 to 17 years of age has been opened at Los Angeles Childrens Hospital under the direction of Dr. Donald Weston. This will help provide for the medical needs of adolescents who are no longer pediatric patients yet whose specific problems of growth and development may be unfamiliar to the physicians who provide medical care to the adult.

Before seeing an adolescent patient, Dr. Weston makes an appointment with the parents and from them gathers all pertinent information about the child's medical history and his adjustment to family, school and friends. He explains at that time that he will be the child's doctor and that what takes place between him and the child will be held in medical confidence. If there is to be any discussion with the parents, it would have to be with the child's permission. He assures the parents, however, that whenever he believes it to be important to do so he will urge the youngster's cooperation in sharing information with them.

In addition to providing medical care for adolescent patients, the Unit has three other major objectives: To provide training to resident doctors and community physicians in how to deal with an adolescent patient as a total person; to develop research programs to learn more about the physiological and psychological processes of adolescence and thus devise better diagnosis, therapeutic and preventive medical care; and to focus the community's attention on the normal physiological and emotional needs of the adolescent.